In this paper we, as superintendent, have created a plan to solve the problems at Hickory Ridge High School, problem 5 in the *Education Leadership* textbook by William G. Cunningham and Paula A. Cordeiro. Principal O’Connor is facing challenges in his administrative role. He struggles with negative culture and a divided staff. The school is lacking a vision and mission that are supported in meaningful ways. There is no technology framework and an effective evaluation system is needed to gauge student, teacher and program success.

We used an instructional approach known as problem-based learning, “an approach that uses typical problems of practice as the context for an in-depth investigation of core content”(Cunningham, 2009). In this investigation, we intend to answer the following questions: 1. How can you get staff members to develop their full potential and encourage their full participation in a school-improvement process? 2. If power means the capacity to mobilize resources, influence others, and “get things done,” how can different staff members be given power so they can develop the credibility needed to be respected and ultimately “get school reform done”? 3. What are the sources of order, power, and purpose within the school?’ 4. What types of efforts will facilitate complex learning, creativity, experimentation, and continuous improvement of the school? 5. How will you know that you are nurturing potential and capacity?

Over the course of the last year, members of the Hickory Ridge High School faculty, staff, parents and business partners were driven towards a multitude of reform initiatives. Unfortunately, they had minimal success, as their test scores reflected. Standards based education reform has been a driving force in the United States since the 1980’s with the publication of *A Nation at Risk*. The vision to create and ensure that every state had rigorous standards was pushed forward when the No Child Left Behind policy was passed in 2001. This predominant issue requires components that Hickory Ridge High School seems to be lacking. These components consist of the following: concrete, measurable and higher standards in an integrated curriculum, criterion-referenced testing, efforts and attention put towards lessening the academic gaps, and high-stakes standardized testing (Stillman, 2009). Hickory Ridge administration lacks the direction and intent needed to help drive the remaining faculty and staff towards the reform initiatives that need to be met.

The redefining of a vision, creation of a participative decision making model, the adoption of the Kagan Cooperative Learning Program, fostering a positive school culture, the creation of effective staff development, the development of professional learning communities within the school, a commitment to standards based reform efforts and a new technology plan will be the focus of our solutions for Hickory Ridge High School. Many of these aforementioned products are at the forefront of school reform in our communities.

1. **How can you get staff members to develop their full potential and encourage their full participation in a school-improvement process?**

Utilizing the Kagan Cooperative Learning Program to invigorate students and student achievement as well as unite the staff in working towards the newly redefined vision of the school will be an important reform effort. Teachers at Hickory Ridge High School would attend trainings on how to implement the program by actively participating in the curriculum with the structures meant for students. Teachers actively learn how to execute structures by experiencing them firsthand. A structure is a step-by-step activity that is meant to increase student’s engagement and cooperation with each other. These activities allow the students to work together and collaborate in the learning process. When teachers are being trained on the program, the teachers of Hickory Ridge High will be asked to work together and to collaborate to complete the training. The teacher’s teams or cooperative groups will be determined by a Kagan structure, not by teachers choosing whom to sit with. This allows teachers to get familiar with other staff members and to help gain mutual respect for each other. When working in an unfamiliar team, you are pushed to learn more about each other to successfully complete tasks and as an end result the faculty would become more united and have a deeper understanding of each other’s talents and perspectives. Younger teachers and older teachers alike can benefit from the Kagan structures.

A school in the Northeast used the Kagan program to unify its staff. The principal used structures with the faculty to build a stronger sense of community within the school. (Bromley& Modlo, 2007) According to Bromley and Modlo, the principal and the other staff members who were trained to use structures, used them with the staff at monthly meetings, on conference days, with the Building Planning Team (a site-based decision-making group) and with other task forces within the school. The principal also offered to model cooperative learning structures in the classrooms of teachers who had not received the in-service training. If principal O’Conner used these structures and embraced the Kagan concept, he would be looked at as instructional leader who supports the teacher’s efforts to better meet the needs of students. Incorporating the Kagan program into the Hickory Ridge culture will help establish a positive, cooperative school climate that promoted experimentation and risk taking (Bromley & Modlo, 2007).

Principal O'Connor needs to change the divide that has emerged in the school. The new teachers have less respect for him and the old regime feels that the new teachers don't have a respect for the knowledge they possess. In utilizing (PDM) he can encourage teachers to find new opportunities and challenges. These will be found through sharing and combining the collective knowledge of the faculty. Creating a school in which teachers see their peers as mentors, team members and valuable resources will change the climate of the school. Teachers fitting in the model will bond and work harder to create innovations and a collaborative atmosphere.

1. **If power means the capacity to mobilize resources, influence others, and “get things done,” how can different staff members be given power so they can develop the credibility needed to be respected and ultimately “get school reform done”?**

In order for Principal O’Conner to fully empower his staff members, he must give them the freedom to take risks and feel support from the administration demonstrated by classroom walk-throughs and conferencing. Promoting collaboration throughout the school and within grade levels will create a stronger professional community and will result in teachers feeling motivated to create engaging, technological lessons. As the educators see their collaborative efforts as successful, they will be motivated to work together towards achieving more goals and eventually becoming more effective as a faculty.

The next step would be to develop a professional learning community. Learning communities become important ways of supporting individual construction of meaning and knowledge (Kinnucan-Welsch & Jenlink, 1998). A book club is a positive step towards building relationships between the staff members. As superintendent, we would recommend that Principal O’Connor read the book Water the Bamboo by Greg Bell. This book will be an impetus of change for the mindset of the school; it provides self-reflection of values, vision, goals, managing change and relationships.

When considering school reform, the relationship between leadership and school improvement must be considered (Harris, 2004). The leadership style of Jim O’Connor must be evaluated. As the superintendent, we would meet with Mr. O’Connor and have him complete a self- evaluation of his leadership style. We would then ask him to reflect on this and together we would devise an action plan for the school to improve morale, encourage leadership, and foster a collaborative environment within the school. An administrator’s role must be one of “culture builder” (Owens, 2010). Jim O’Connor’s role is vital in changing the culture of Hickory High School.

1. **What are the sources of order, power, and purpose within the school?**

One major component to Hickory Ridge High Schools reform stems from the continuous professional growth in leadership. Principal O’ Conner’s leadership style is having a huge impact on why the school is unable to grow and improve. According to McGregor’s Theory X approach, Principal O’ Conner currently falls into this category of an autocratic leadership style. The expectation of the district is to implement a new technology driven curriculum and to do so, the principal will need to examine his Theory X assumptions and move more towards a democratic approach of leading his staff. According to Cunningham and Cordeiro, the Theory Y approach is collaborative and encourages a team effort to develop and express their views and ideas in order to better the overall organization. Many of the staff members are young and motivated, so the transition from managing his staff to empowering his staff should help Principal O’ Connor shift his leadership style. Since the staff members would be given the opportunity to participate in the decision making process, the staff would feel more ownership and pride in the school. He also needs to recognize the staff member’s enthusiasm to collaborate; which will lead to the teachers feeling more empowered and united (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2009).

A powerful component of any community is its culture. The culture of the school can set the tone and atmosphere in which the vision, mindset and focus of the community efforts are framed and supported. School culture can be difficult to define, but influences every part of the daily operations and is a source of great power in any school. Hoy and Miskel (2001) suggest that culture consists of shared assumptions, values, and norms. The staff at Hickory High School is divided, which has had a negative effect on the culture of the school. The task faced by the administration at Hickory High School is to develop an action plan to improve the culture of the school.

An assessment of the current attitudes shared by the staff is important in determining what steps need to be taken to begin to change the culture at Hickory High School. The principal needs to encourage the staff members who are willing to take on a leadership role, as well as find out why the remaining staff is hesitant toward change. There is a divide among experienced teachers and new teachers. One possible way to encourage collaboration might be to pair the new teachers with an experienced teacher for a year as an informal mentor or “buddy”. These pairs could work together on projects throughout the year. The experienced teachers have a wealth of knowledge and experience, while the new teachers have enthusiasm and can offer a different perspective to situations. If a middle ground can be found and the divided staff members feel comfortable working together, the staff will benefit as a whole and begin to operate as a cohesive unit. This informal “buddy” system will eventually transform into a form professional learning community model for Hickory Ridge High School.

Community and stakeholder involvement also plays a role in the culture of a school. As Superintendent, we would suggest that Principal O’Connor form a committee within the school comprised of representation from each department to be ambassadors for the school. This group would reach out to local businesses, community leaders, and organizations in the area to request their support for Hickory High School. We would invite community members and business owners to Hickory High School as often as possible so that they can see firsthand the positive changes that are being made. The staff and students will also benefit from the feeling of support from the community.

Technology can assist in the efforts to improve school culture. Hickory Ridge outfitted each classroom with at least fifteen computers and the district has obtained the necessary equipment to make this school a technology center for the district. However, the amount of teacher and student use has been disappointing. This provides administration with an opportunity to provide support, assistance, and training to the staff in order for the teachers to feel comfortable with the new technology. This would also provide another opportunity for the staff to collaborate. Newer teachers may have more experience in integrating technology that they can share with teachers who may feel less comfortable with how to use the new technology in their classrooms.

1. **What types of efforts will facilitate complex learning, creativity, experimentation, and continuous improvement of the school?**

Hickory Ridge High School is lacking a vision developed by all stakeholders of the school and community. There is a vision statement of the school, but this vision has not been modified in years. As schools change, so should the vision and mission of the school. The vision is the single most important aspect of change in a school. Each year, it is important that visions be looked at, and revised if necessary. According to Hill(2010), “vision is something that can guide us as individuals or as organizations to reach a point that we have given some thought to rather than simply arriving wherever we might end up. Vision has a lot to do with where you will be in two years, five years, or even at the end of your years. Having a vision and seeing that vision come into reality will also have a lot to do with how satisfied we are at the end of whatever time period we might choose to examine…another characteristic of vision is that it can create a sense of anticipation that lets us experience a sense of fulfillment even before a goal is reached.” Without a vision that all stakeholders agree upon, there is no direction or goal to guide daily practices. Teachers post objective’s as part of a lesson to guide student outcome the same must be true of teacher objectives and school visions and missions. The fact that the teachers and staff, including Mr. O’Connor are divided as a community, an agreed upon vision will help to align the staff and unite them as a team working towards a common goal.

Effective staff development contains three components crucial to successful implementation. Professional development must include the supporting of teacher growth, bridging the gaps, and giving teachers the tools to succeed. The new teachers and the veteran teachers need to see each other as allies and not enemies. They are all there for the greater purpose of educating children. These teachers bring a wealth of knowledge to the school and potentially to one another. Principal O’Conner must fix the broken and misguided relationships within the school walls or he will not be able to retain or gain the respect of the community at-large.

Staff development should focus on team building such as the Kagan structures mentioned earlier in the paper. The Kagan program can help build teams using academic and non-academic themes. Adults want learning opportunities that are meaningful and practical to them, offer an immediate pay-off, involve reflection on their many experiences, and include social, active learning (Glathorn,1990). A review of adult learning theories identified specific conditions that may promote learning in the workplace: (1) opportunities for individuals to work with and learn from others on an ongoing basis; (2) collaboration in group work and learning; (3) chance to work with and learn from others of similar position; and (4) variation, challenge, autonomy, and choice in work roles and tasks (Smylie, 1995). In contrast to these conditions, many professional development opportunities for teachers are mandatory, uniform for all teachers, ancillary to their daily work, and occur only periodically.

1. **How will you know that you are nurturing potential and capacity?**

The teachers and staff at Hickory Ridge have a variety of expertise in their respective field; the veteran teachers know and understand the culture of the local community, the rookie teachers are entering Hickory Ridge with the most up to date knowledge on technology and best practices in education. If both groups of teachers can learn to work together rather than in spite of each other, Hickory Ridge will not only see an improvement in academics but also an improvement in the overall school community. The current reform plan for Hickory Ridge including the use of team building, Kagan exercises, and parental involvement has the potential to truly make an impact not only on student learning, but also change the culture of the entire school community.   
 Productive approaches for assessing outcomes are becoming increasingly important; to begin with teachers and staff at Hickory Ridge must first evaluate their current teaching practices (Darling-Hammond, 2006).This can be accomplished in the form of a simple survey or an in-person interview; before the implementation of the school reform at Hickory Ridge Mr. O’Conner could ask his staff to rate their current level of expertise as well as their willingness to collaborate with other teachers both at their current grade level and within their school. After the team building, Kagan exercises, and staff development workshops, Mr. O’Conner could have his staff complete the same survey or meet privately with each staff member to discuss any changes in their attitudes. The results of both the surveys and/or interviews could be analyzed to determine if the teachers and staff have changed their views in regards to working collaboratively with their colleagues.   
 Robert Marzano, the author of *The Art and Science of Teaching* explained that in order for students to be successful, they need a learning goal that they’re working towards, a scale to measure the goal, and a tool to track their progress (Marzano, 2007). The same theory and practice can be applied to the teachers and staff at Hickory Ridge, they have a learning goal (collaborative teamwork) that they are working towards. A scale/measuring tool needs to be developed in order for teachers and staff members to track their individual progress towards meeting their goal. Marzano suggest creating a rubric for each goal and using that rubric as a scale to measure progress over time. Once teachers know and understand what is expected, they will be better able to accomplish their goals. Mr. O’Conner would be responsible for collecting the data from his staff and tracking the progress of the school as a whole.  
 As the Superintendent of the Wingfield School District, we would also perform several observations at Hickory Ridge both before the implementation of the school reform, during the school reform and again at the end of the school reform. We would keep track of the changes in the school community during each visit, paying special attention to the tone of the teachers as they work with each other. We would make sure to visit during staff meeting days as well as during team and leadership meetings. With the use of surveys, interviews, checklists, and teacher observations, the effectiveness of the school reform at Hickory Ridge can be measured accurately.

The implementation of a systemic technology plan will be essential for Hickory Ridges' success. According to research conducted by Hsu and Sharma (2006) suggests that recruiting key persons to form a leadership team is essential. O'Connor has new and old teachers who are dedicated to the success of their students. He must create a venue for these teachers to lead groups of teachers. The formation of learning communities must be encouraged as well these communities inherently involve stakeholders. Smaller study groups can be formed to research various technology implementation programs and services available to schools. A variety of other activities are necessary in order to make sure of the success of technology integration such as: pilot-testing the use of technology tools, utilizing practice and reflective activities to create the framework for teacher development, bring in the community it is essential to build resources that can help the change process along, actively identify funding opportunities and keep abreast of standards from the state department of education.  
 The district can also model a program known as the National Grid for Learning (NGFL) started in the U.K. It is a Web-based enterprise that is a work in progress. It is a constantly evolving virtual teacher center where teachers throughout England can find first class curriculum materials. If Hickory Ridge is going to be the benchmark for technology in the district, they must have a venue that allows teachers outside the school to see what is working and begin to garner support from surrounding teachers and schools through a grid of this nature. This type of instrument can be helpful to new recruits giving them a wealth of information for planning lessons and aligning assignments with the curriculum. The technology aspect sets the foundation for many possibilities to come. Providing incentives to those gifted teachers who contribute or provide lessons that are most widely downloaded might spur more creativity and create a venue for teacher collaboration. According to Lauren Resnick, a champion of the standards-based reform movement commented that ensuring that every child reaches the standard set, no matter how long it might take is a departure from traditional approach that holds time as the constant with the consequence of varying results. Standards-based reform holds standards constant and sees the time as the variable.  
 Principal O'Connor must gain district support in order to further the development of technology in the school and become the model of the district for technology. Analyzing the level at which teachers currently stand with their technological abilities and essentially creating technology lead teachers who help the more novice teachers implement innovative lessons and ideas into their regular plans will help to transform Hickory Ridge into the true benchmark for technology in the district. This aligns with our plans initiative to create teacher leaders and allow for more stakeholder buy in. According to Holland (2001), the human element in school reform cannot be overemphasized. It is the key component that will ultimately determine the initiatives success of failure. Principal O'Connor must embrace the strength of his teachers and their determination to achieve student success in order for any of these reform efforts to be effective. The human capital at Hickory Ridge must come together with a strong leader and blaze the path towards a brighter, more technologically advanced, successful learning community.

Summary:

Most adult learning theories reflect a constructivist view of learning in which learners acquire new knowledge by constructing it for themselves (Smylie, 1995; Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998). Learning in a constructivist perspective is “understood as a self-regulating process of resolving inner cognitive conflicts that often become apparent through concrete experience, collaborative discourse, and reflection” (Brooks & Brooks, 1993, p. vii). Learning is not only a matter of transferring ideas from one that is knowledgeable to one who is not. Instead, learning is perceived as a personal, reflective, and transformative process where ideas, experiences, and points of view are integrated and knowledge is created. When a constructivist perspective is applied to teacher learning, a key focus becomes how teachers learn to make critically reflective judgments in the midst of action and how they subsequently change their actions in response to new insights (Zepeda, 1999).

Principal O’Connor needs to set a framework of reform for his staff. Powerful leadership will help increase staff performance and student achievement. Principal O’Connor is lacking in this area, as his knowledge is focused primarily on the community, people, and existing programs and policies within the school district. A concrete plan and vision can help Principal O’Connor relay the expectations of reform to his faculty and staff. Effective planning a redefining of the schools vision and mission, participative decision-making, creation of professional learning communities, mentor programs, evaluation tools, fostering a positive school culture and appropriate professional development opportunities will provide the administration and faculty with a standard to measure implementation and success of new programs. These standards will serve as a concrete set of goals for staff behavior and performance and for student knowledge and skills. Principal O’Connor needs to eliminate his fixed mindset and set the expectation that participation in standard based school reform is not an option, but an expectation as they strive towards their vision every day. The older teachers need to move towards having a growth mindset. They need to realize that education is ever-changing and it is time to jump on the bandwagon. Over time, consistency will need to be applied across classrooms and through these efforts of reform, achievement will increase if standards and expectations are put into place and people are being held accountable for following them (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001).

*Reform initiatives are vital for the success of Hickory Ridge, however it takes more than just creating and implementing the change. If a school is going to be successful with their reform initiatives, they must evaluate their improvement efforts. Technology plays a large role in the efforts of standard based school reform. Educational applications can provide teachers with feedback in a time efficient and constructive manner (Bain & Swan, 2011). This technology and feedback will allow teachers to see the evidence needed to help them improve and drive their instruction. Technology tools can provide Hickory Ridge teachers with the necessary information they need to differentiate instruction and create classroom groupings where necessary.*

Evidence based practice provided through technology gives room for constructive feedback about instructional practice of the teachers of Hickory Ridge. For the older teachers at Hickory Ridge, this technology driven evidence can give them the information they need to see that reform and change is necessary, rather than staying in their fixed mindset. For the younger teachers, they can utilize it as an opportunity to see where growth can take place for themselves as educators or where they are most strong. Collaboratively, the educators at Hickory Ridge can use this technology to help recognize where instructional focus needs to be placed. It can also be used for professional development as they discover who on their team of educators has the skills and techniques that are currently working for their student population. Technology and data analysis is a vital component in evaluating the success and efforts of school reform (Bain & Swan, 2011).

As superintendent, we will encourage Principal O’Connor to help his teachers to work together utilizing the participative decision making model and collaborative leadership approaches, bridge the gap between his faculty with Kagan structures and the development of professional learning communities, redefine the vision and mission of the school with his community, embrace the framework and concepts of standard-based reform efforts and implement a new technology plan to gauge teacher, student and program success. These initiatives will be fully supported by the district and Principal O’Connor and his staff will receive the release time, funding and support needed to make Hickory Ridge High School the benchmark for all schools in the district.

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